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Front Edit Other
Page Page Page

Date: MAY 12 1961

TUB-THUMPS FOR SECRECY

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has professed himself shocked because so much of his "secret" testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee last month was released for publication. His own Pentagon security experts released this data.

Mr. McNamara complained because the press has carried statements the Nike-Zeus anti-missile missile is far from perfection. He asserted "what we ought to be saying is that we have the most perfect anti-ICBM system the human mind will ever devise."

Aside from the fact this is a bald policy of misinforming the public, the Defense Secretary should know that the President himself observed in his budget message the reason Nike-Zeus funds were limited is because this is definitely not a proved weapon.

If these stories impair the nation's defense, they have been made public property by the government itself.

It is irrational and presumptuous to blame the press for mistakes government has made. Yet this seems precisely what the Defense Secretary and others in Washington are now doing.

The usually shrewd Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia also got into the act. He was quoted in the Senate transcript as saying he has an "almost unspeakable contempt for any man in politics who would be frightened by newspapers telling him they would attack him because he was not giving them intimate details about defense planning."

When has this ever happened? Who was concerned? If Senator Russell has any information of this nature, he should give names and dates.

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We deeply doubt any reputable newspaper or newsman would try to club secret defense data from officials through such intimidation. Almost universally when defense information has been printed, it has been given out or approved for release by Federal authorities.

Senator Symington is right. A plethora of so-called secret information is not secret at all. He knows from his experience with de-

fense, the most extensive of any member of Congress.

There is small question that government has a problem in the issue of defense secrecy. This is a problem deeply involved with democratic principles of the system we hold and are dedicated to preserve. Only totalitarian states avoid this difficulty. They have no free speech, no free press. Are we to ape the cult we fight?

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There has been too much indiscriminate publication of defense secrets in this country. But it has not been because of press extortion or newspaper irresponsibility. It has been because government has leaked such facts or openly divulged them.

The way to halt dissemination of defense matters—that aid and comfort an enemy—is not to use the bland misrepresentation Mr. McNamara reportedly advocates. The Pentagon or other officials can simply say "no comment."

Freedom is an integral part of the American way. We must cling to it hardily, not follow the path of Communist or other regimes that control the press and delude the people.

If honest appeal is made to withhold defense facts for the nation's security, they will be withheld upon clear evidence that publication would be harmful to the country.

The administration is raw sore because of the dismal failure in the Cuban invasion. Yet a State Department spokesman said recently no one had ever requested the press to hold off on stories about preparation for the venture.

While President Kennedy shouldered all responsibility for the fiasco, the timing and tenor of his speech before newspaper publishers in New York implied the administration laid some blame on the press. A White House attitude has suggestively been that the Soviet holds one great advantage in the cold war—secrecy.

This administration tendency toward secrecy was evident long before the Cuba blunder. It is an unwise and dangerous bent which cannot wholly be covered by an umbrella of "security."

The McNamara outburst is another in a series of tub-thumps for a policy edging toward Federal censorship.